

Message Text

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TO USMISSION EC BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 051326

PASS ASSISTANT SECRETARY ENDERS

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO DAMASCUS, JIDDA, KUWAIT,
BAGHDAD FROM BEIRUT DATED 6 MAR:

QUOTE: C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3044

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRD, PFOR, SA, LE

SUBJ: LEBANON-SAUDI ECONOMIC PACT EXPIRES

REF: BEIRUT 2931

1. IN DISCUSSION WITH LEBANESE FOREIGN MINISTER TAQLA
ON OTHER
MATTERS MARCH 5 I RAISED QUESTION OF EXPIRATION
LEBANESE-SAUDI ECONOMIC AGREEMENT. FOREIGN MINISTER
CONFIRMED THAT NO PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE IN RENEWING PACT
AND HE WAS OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED.

2. FROM PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR,
TAQLA INDICATED THAT THE BASIC PROBLEM SEEMED TO BE LOCAL
PRESS ATTACKS AGAINST BOTH SAUDI ARABIA AND KING FAISAL.
THE FOREIGN MINISTER ENDEAVORED TO EXPLAIN TO THE
AMBASSADOR THAT LEBANON HAD A FREE PRESS, MANY OF
THE PAPERS WERE REGRETTABLY IN THE PAY OF OTHER GOVERN-
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MENTS INCLUDING THAT OF SAUDI ARABIA AND CONSEQUENTLY

ITS CAPACITY TO SUPPRESS SUCH ARTICLES WAS LIMITED.
HE ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR LEBANON
ATTACHED HIGHEST IMPORTANCE TO ITS RELATIONS WITH SAUDI
ARABIA AND HELD KING FAISAL IN HIGHEST ESTEEM. AS A
RESULT OF THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE TWO MEN, TAQLA
ARRANGED FOR A STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE CABINET
REITERATING THE IMPORTANCE THAT THE GOL ATTACHED TO ITS
RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND ALSO THE GREAT RESPECT
WHICH IT HAD FOR FAISAL. (WE CANNOT FIND SUCH A STATE-
MENT.) THE AMBASSADOR, ACCORDING TO TAQLA, TOOK THIS
STATEMENT AND RETURNED TO SAUDI ARABIA AND HASN'T BEEN BACK
SINCE.

3. TAQLA IS OBVIOUSLY MOST ANXIOUS TO STRAIGHTEN THE
PROBLEM OUT AND HAVE THE AGREEMENT RENEWED. HE IS WIL-
LING TO DO ANYTHING REASONABLE BUT HAS MADE CLEAR THAT
LEBANON WAS NOT GOING DOWN ON ITS KNEES TO OBTAIN A
RENEWAL. THROUGH PERSONAL PERSUASION HE INDICATED
THAT HE HAD QUIETED THE PRESS DOWN VIS-A-VIS SAUDI
ARABIA. TAQLA STATED THAT HE WOULD BE MOST APPRECIAT-
IVE OF ANYTHING THE U.S.G. COULD DO TO TRY TO PERSUADE
THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT TO RENEW THE AGREEMENT AND RESTORE
RELATIONS TO WHAT THEY HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY. I AGREED
TO PASS HIS REQUEST ON TO MY GOVERNMENT.

4. COMMENT: AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT IN REFTEL, THE
ECONOMIC AGREEMENT IS OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE TO
LEBANON. THE BASIC PROBLEM HERE APPEARS TO BE THAT THE
SAUDIS SIMPLY CANNOT UNDERSTAND THAT A GOVERNMENT BY DEFINITION
HAS ONLY LIMITED CONTROL OVER A FREE PRESS. LEBANON HAS
ENOUGH PROBLEMS ON ITS PLATE AT THE MOMENT WITHOUT HAVING
POOR RELATIONS WITH A COUNTRY AS IMPORTANT TO IT AS SAUDI
ARABIA. IF THE DEPARTMENT AND AMBASSADOR AKINS DO FEEL
IN A POSITION TO BE HELPFUL ON THIS ONE, I WOULD APPRECIATE
BEING KEPT INFORMED BY AMBASSADOR AKINS ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE
DONE SO THAT WE CAN SO INFORM FOREIGN MINISTER TAQLA.
HOUGHTON
UNQUOTE INGERSOLL

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